

# T<sup>3</sup>: Trustee Training Tips

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## BUILDING YOUR BOARD

New trustees are constantly being appointed to library boards across the state, but the beginning of the state fiscal year brings the largest number at any one time. And that means that more than a few boards are looking for new members right now. How do you fill those empty chairs with the best possible people?

Selecting new trustees is not an activity confined to a couple of months before needed—it is an on-going process. Building a competent board follows a continuous cycle: inventory needs; identify characteristics; cultivate prospects; recruit; orient; engage; educate; rotate; evaluate; and then start all over again. A smart board will have a number of potential nominees in mind at any given time. After all, one never knows when a vacancy may occur. Nor does this advice have to be limited to taxing district libraries, for non-taxing districts may wish to whisper words of encouragement into the ears of individuals who would approach their appointing authority to seek a seat on the library board.

To begin, the sitting board needs to identify the skills, knowledge, perspectives, and connections of its current members. Whatever is missing leads to a profile of the ideal board member. Next comes cultivating the list of prospects. Get them interested and involved in the library; keep them informed about programs and services.

Perhaps the linchpin in this cycle is a step often overlooked—recruiting the prospect. The best approach is a personal one made by the current member(s) who knows them best. Do your homework; know what you are asking them for and be honest about the responsibilities and time demands expected. Make them feel good about having been selected, even if they must turn you down. Provide a job description. Yes, a job description for the position of Trustee. [see page 3.] Let them know how much you appreciate their willingness to get involved.

Orientation is essential. It should be done by both a trustee and the director, as well as the more generic version done by the regional consultant from KDLA. The first board meeting with the new appointee should include introductions and a formal welcome by the board president. Engage them in discussions of library issues right away and make sure they have sufficient background. Don't hide or gloss over problems. Rotation is covered by law, but don't automatically re-elect for a second term.

Finally, at the annual evaluation of the director, set aside some time to do a board evaluation as well. Identify ways to improve, but also celebrate victories no matter how small.

## BOARD COMMITMENT LETTER

Library trustees need to know what is expected of them. The board, or nominating committee, should consider sending each new member a letter of commitment that includes at least the following: term of office, times and dates of meetings, and attendance requirements. When a new trustee joins the board, he or she is then asked to sign "on the dotted line" and keep a copy. Below is a sample letter, to be done on library letterhead, for new appointees and an annual renewal pledge for all trustees.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to serve on the \_\_\_\_\_ Public Library Board of Trustees. Our library's mission is \_\_\_\_\_.

All board members are expected to attend the monthly meetings, held on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ at the library. Kentucky Revised Statutes allow only three absences per term year, but the Library Board anticipates fewer than that of its members. There may be additional special called meetings from time to time as needs require.

The length of your term is four (4) years, beginning \_\_\_\_\_ and ending \_\_\_\_\_. [Note: please indicate if trustee is filling out an unexpired term. In such cases the beginning of the term will be immediately and the end will be the date said term would have ended had the original appointee remained.]

All board members are expected to participate in board orientations from the local board and from the regional consultant from the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives. To help with the orientation process, your board mentor is \_\_\_\_\_ [include phone number and e-mail address].

Should you have questions about being able to fulfill your duties, please call \_\_\_\_\_ [include phone number].

Please sign the enclosed two copies, keep one and give one to the board president at your first meeting.

Welcome aboard. We look forward to working with you to make our library the best it can be.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Board Appointee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Board President

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## AFFIRMATION OF SERVICE

1. I continue to be fully supportive of our mission, purpose, goals, and leadership.
2. I understand that board membership requires an equivalent of x hours per month, including preparations and meetings. I am able to give that time during the 12 months ahead, and I expect to attend all board [and committee] meetings unless I give advance notice of my need to be absent for good cause.
3. I have reviewed and intend to comply with our board's conflict of interest policy.
4. (add other items important to your board at this time)
5. If anything should occur during the year that would prevent me from being a positive contributor to our board, I will take the initiative to talk to the officers about a voluntary resignation to allow another to serve who is able to be fully involved.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## TRUSTEE JOB DESCRIPTION

**POSITION:** Board Member

**REPORTS TO:** Board President

**GENERAL:** Together with other Board members, set major policies and assume overall responsibility for the affairs of the public library.

### QUALIFICATIONS:

Demonstrated interest in the library;

Knowledge, experience and/or demonstrated skills required by the Board for effective service;

Representative of some aspect or segment of the community;

Willingness to participate in Board functions, expand knowledge of Board responsibilities, and represent the Public Library in the community.

### RESPONSIBILITIES:

Attend regular monthly and special called meetings;

Participate in the formation of governance policies;

Actively support the work of the Public Library by attending at least one program; attend and support other events to the extent possible.

### TIME/COMMITMENT:

3-4 hours monthly, typically

1-2 hours Board meeting

1 hour preparation

1 hour attending special event

**TERM:** Four years, eligible for appointment to a second four-year term upon recommendation of the Board. Mandatory rotation after two terms.

## MAJOR RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Determine the Library's mission and purpose. [Who are we and why do we exist? Who do we serve? What services do we offer?]
2. Select the chief executive (director).
3. Support the director and assess his or her performance.
4. Ensure effective organizational planning. [Formal long-range planning as well as annual review]
5. Ensure adequate resources.
6. Manage resources effectively; increase as possible. [Budgeting, fiscal oversight, audits, seek income increases]
7. Determine, monitor, and strengthen the Library's programs and services.
8. Enhance the Library's public image.
9. Ensure legal and ethical integrity and maintain accountability.
10. Recruit and orient new board members and assess board performance.

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## LIBRARY LETTERS

*Dear Marian Librarian,*

*We've found an excellent choice for a seat on our board, but she lives in the adjoining county. She owns a business in our town, is a member of several civic organizations, and is very active in community affairs. Can we nominate her for an appointment?*

*-- Troubled Trustee*

Dear Troubled,

Congratulations on finding the "perfect" trustee. Be sure to let the neighboring library know so they can consider her for their next board opening. Your library, however, cannot nominate any person who does not live in your county. This applies to all libraries, regardless of how they were established. All trustees must reside in the county upon whose board they serve. This is not the same as qualifying for a library card; owning property in your county doesn't count.

## QUOTABLE QUOTES

"The [library] board of trustees operates at the intersection of public trust and organizational performance."

John Carver, in *Boards That Make a Difference*, suggests that the board start with broad policies, develop more specific policies, and then at some point say to [the director], "We have said enough. Now you go ahead and make decisions that you feel are best. Just stay within the parameters we have defined for you."

"What do I want? I want board members who carry our brochures in their briefcases, who tell everyone—their friends, family, the guy they're waiting in line with, the editor of the newspaper—about this great organization they volunteer for."

*-- Board Chair, Community Foundation*

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